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AUTHOR Thomas, M. Donald; Lewy, Rafael
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ABSTRACT

In our desire to establish social justice, we have neglected individual morality. Moral education was once a major part of the school experience, but has been lost in the present era of pluralistic ethics. While social-situational ethics have brought some good results, such as greater justice for minorities and governmental reform, they have also promoted such ideas as the end justifies the means or a social cause comes before conscience. What is now needed is an educational program in citizenship that leads to positive moral and ethical conduct. The first step in moral education is the development of a rational process of thinking based on the study of tradition in the social sciences and the humanities. Teaching ethics requires the establishment of basic principles that are to be learned. The Salt Lake City School District has delineated 12 such principles that can be taught in a variety of programs, from law-related education to journalism. Of greatest significance is the teachers' commitment to ethics. Teachers of ethics need to develop critical thinking skills and to be, themselves, students of law, moral philosophy, history, logic, and the fine arts. (Author/WD)

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ETHICS EDUCATION: RE-DISCOVERING AMERICA

M. Donald Thomas and Rafael Lewy*

"Many adult Americans seem hazy about the need that any organized society has for a basic system to regulate social behavior and why a dynamic society which attempts to operate on a democratic basis has a heavy responsibility for keeping that system up-to-date. The responsibility needs to be understood and to be accepted as being both individual and collective. Past contributions by many of our schools to developing the understanding needed have been too close to zero. Past neglect creates two present requirements: (a) to do a better job with present and future youth; (b) to do a repair job with adults because of neglect when they were youth.

Increases in crime and in problems to correction or rehabilitation concerning offenders mean a growth in burdensomeness of the repair job. When demands for repair expand substantially, the situation could be looked upon as the tail wagging the dog. But yet we seem quite slow to conceive and to implement adequate preventive measures."

Harold H. Punke

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Ethics education is not new to our schools. The Northwest Ordinance of 178? states: "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." The United States of America has had a long time commitment to teaching moral values and ethical conduct.

Today, however, it appears that ethics education is no longer fashionable in either the home or the school. Our society no longer emphasizes honesty, truthfulness, responsibility, respect for law, and obedience of adult authority. In our desire to establish social justice we have neglected individual morality.

* Thomas is Superintendent of Schools and Lewy is a Specialist in Federal Programs Salt Lake City Utah School District.

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The strong emphasis on social-situational ethics has brought some good results: greater justice for minorities, the lessening of pollution, reform of governmert, better business practices, and so on. The evils of this trend, however, are increasingly clear: the end justifies the means, the social cause comes before conscience, and Watergate can be justified on the basis of national security. Jeb Stuart Magruder testified before the Senate that he learned his ethics from leading situational ethics proponent, William Sloan Coffin. The election of Richard Nixon was of such value, Magruder reasoned, that it was to be obtained at all costs, even by illegal means.

The trend toward pluralistic ethics has produced too many people all too willing to put success ahead of personal standards and cleverness ahead of character. Pluralism leads to a society of no ethics at worst. At best it is a society of conflicting ethics leading to conflict and confrontation. In such a society our schools must take the lead to restore some sanity and sense to our lives. Individual ethics must once again become a central part of our lives, and a common core of values once again unite the people of our nation in a common purpose to greatness.

Recent developments in our educational and social setting have brought about some hopeful changes toward a revival of ethics education:

- Almost every state in the nation is taking a new look at citizenship education, including moral education.
- Major private foundations are supporting curriculum development in ethics education.
- Ethics education has captured the interest of the American Bar Association, the National Institute for Education, colleges and universities, and hundreds of school districts.

-Major education associations have expressed a strong new interest in ethics and citizenship education.

-The works of researches in moral development are rapidly finding their way into teacher education courses, workshops and educational conferences.

-There is strong public readiness for educating our youth to be good citizens.

On the other hand, things still need to be done:

-We need to develop a basic understanding of ethics education based on accepted democratic values. Any system of ethics which does not rely on basic national principles may not be moral or reasonable.

-We need to re-emphasize individual ethical conduct as opposed to social ethics. Social ethics has a tendency to produce an "ends justify the means" position and a "situational ethics" system of morality.

-We need to enlist the support of all social institutions to rededicate themselves to teaching ethics and moral conduct.

-In the schools, we need to develop formal curricula for the teaching of ethical behavior. Incidental teaching of moral principles does not appear to be adequate in producing moral behavior.

-Institutions of society must obtain congruence between what they say and what they do. There is often a clevage between our professed ethics and our actions.

-Schools need to rededicate themselves to excellence in everything they do. Without quality education moral citizenship is seriously handicapped.

-Each of the professions must develop more effective strategies to enforce ethical practices among its members.

One cannot study the area of ethics education without gaining a new appreciation for individual ethical conduct. In our recent attempts to reform the institutions of our society we have moved to a "situational ethics" position which justifies immoral individual action to obtain a social good.

Pluralism in ethical behavior leads to disintegration of personal obligation for doing the right things. Under such a system there is no code of common assumptions to be adhered to by all. Common purposes cannot be achieved. Society becomes confused and ethics become trivial.

The great strength of our nation is the diversity of its people with various ethnic backgrounds. This great strength, however, must not be weakened through extreme pluralism which legitimized every social goal and every individual act, regardless of its moral base. We must be able to appreciate diversity, but be accountable for individual moral action.

That individual ethical obligation has been weakened is evidenced in many areas of our society. The United States has become one of the high crime-rate countries of the world. Furthermore, recidivism in our nation is increasing at a rapid rate. The crime rate seems to be doubling about every 8-10 years. The crime rate is particularly heavy among juveniles and white collar workers.

Weakened ethical commitment is also seen in the rising number of children that are neglected and abused. It is seen in the lack of excellence in workmanship and in "grade inflation" in schools and colleges. It is also revealed in a nation which is indifferent to violence, to the needs of its senior citizens, and to the proliferation of pornography.

Individual ethical responsibility is a private, personal matter. It is something we choose to do. We can no longer blame society, our parents, our "station in life," or the weather for the individual acts of men and women. Each person must be responsible for what he does or does not do. As Emerson said, "If you wish not to be known for something, then you should not do it."

In the early days of our country, moral education was a major part of the school experience. Ethical principles were extracted from the Bible, Poor Richard's Almanac, and the basic documents of our nation. Jefferson insisted that students at the University of Virginia study the Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, and The Mayflower Compact. Most patriots believed that education was of little value unless it was coupled with the moral development of the individual.

The founders of our Republic believed that education was a necessary basis for liberty, equality, justice, and the public good. Over and over again they stressed the need for free public schools to educate for "knowledge, civic values, and obligations required of everyone." They agreed that schools should teach "history, principles of government, and patriotic and moral values." The textbooks of that day were infused with selections to teach both "love of country" and "social virtues." Teachers extolled the Franklin virtues: industry, frugality, charity, honesty, and dependability.

It is interesting to note that many are now re-discovering Thomas Jefferson. Recently the Utah State Board of Education established competency in the structure of government as a requirement for graduation from high school. In 1779, in proposing a state University of Virginia, Jefferson wrote that the University should teach "the principles and structure of government." Jefferson also urged that strong programs for civic and legal education be established.

The National Task Force on Education for Responsible Citizenship recognizes that moral and ethical conduct and citizenship are inextricably linked together. Civic education is a study of democratic values and ethical issues. Students should

not only understand citizenship, they must also practice its privileges in an arena of moral and ethical conduct. The tragedy of Watergate alone is a persuasive argument that we cannot achieve political goals of citizenship without a high level of morality in personal conduct.

What is now needed is a renewed dedication to educational excellence - quality in both the basic tools of learning and an appreciation of the American systems. We should all work to make obligation, love of country, and respect for law fashionable. The home, the school, the church, business and industry - all must work in concert to re-discover the virtues of this nation and to pass them on to our children. The vitality and stability of America are dependent on our ability to do just that, and to do it effectively.

Our task is to construct a program in citizenship education which leads to moral and ethical conduct. We need to train administrators and teachers. We need to develop curricula. We need to enlist the help of parents and other citizens. These are the things we in education know how to do and can do well. The only question is -- do we feel the obligation to do so?

If schools are to play a larger role in education for values, one must ask if values can be taught. Raths et.al.[1] claim that values cannot be defined except that they are important to human existence. The assumption is that a child, irrespective of age, does not enter school as a moral tabula rasa. His values already exist, perhaps in a dormant stage. The process of transfer from passive to active awareness is the process of value clarification. In a way, Raths and his colleagues entertain

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1 Raths Louis, Harman Merrill, Simon Sidney, Values and Teaching, Merrill Books, 1966, pp. 9-10

the premise of the old progressivists by maintaining that how we learn is more important than what we learn, process is more important than content, or if process is right, then content must be right also. The objective is to educate individuals to develop their own moral principals. Values, therefore, are personal. Their educational worth is determined by the individual who, through rational explorations into the depth of his soul, makes ethical judgments. Any absolutist imposition of externally defined values on the individual is difficult, not only because of the lack of internalization, which is inherent in every forceful method, but because of the difference of individual perceptions. Every individual is invited to invent his own moral wheel. However, Raths et.al. agree that there is not a complete freedom of moral choice. There are certain social taboos in the form of public policy. These taboos should not be attacked. They are the fabric of social order.

Kohlberg's Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education does not depart from the relativistic perception. Referring to comprehensive and numerous longitudinal studies, Kohlberg relates moral development to stages of human growth which differ from one another in terms of reference. The moral growth of an individual progresses gradually from outer-directedness to inner-directedness. The translation of this theory, which is derived from developmental psychology, into educational terminology, is, according to Kohlberg, the transition from one stage to another. It is expedited by educational processes. But Kohlberg, like Raths, refrains from moral finality, claiming that the only absolutistic moral value is justice, which, as Fraenkel succinctly points out, is not a universally[2]

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[2] Ibid. pp. 34-35. See also Fraenkel, Jack, "Value Education and Social Studies" Kappan, April 1969, pp. 457-461.

admired concept, and as one may further observe, is only relative to the situation in which it is applied. In the absence of any absolute moral guidelines, it comes as no surprise that an experiment to establish a moral society in a Cambridge, Massachusetts high school, based on the Kohlberg theory, has been less than a spectacular success.[3] Regardless, the aim remains one of the establishing moral principles as a basis for the moral society.

The antithesis of the relativistic approach to moral education is promulgated today by Max Rafferty, who still regards the imperial dictates of moral practices as a viable educational method.[4] Educational philosophers, however, advocate the mitigation of content with reason. "Dwelling exclusively on procedural matters, moral educators have taught the technique of debate without paying attention to what is being debated."[5]

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3 Edwin Fenton (ed) the Cognitive Developmental, April 1976, the entire issue. It must be pointed out that Elsa Wasserman in her article in that issue "Implementing Kohlberg's 'Just Community Concept' in an Alternative High School," pp. 203-207 gives a highly idealized picture of the Kohlberg experiment. Her romanticized statements and allegations were refuted by Kohlberg himself in an interview in People the same year.
Kohlberg, Lawrence, "The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Moral Education" in David Purpel and Devin Ryan, Moral Education, 1976, pp. 176-195.
Kohlberg, Lawrence, "The Moral Atmosphere of the School" Ibid. pp. 196-220
Fraenkel, Jack, "The Kohlberg Bandwagon: Some Reservations," Ibid. pp. 291-308
(The same article also appears in the above mentioned issue of The Cognitive Developmental.)

4 Rafferty, Max, "Teaching Values Important, But Attitude Tests Useless" The Salt Lake Tribune, August 14, 1977

5 Etzioni Amitai, "Schools and Amoral Education" Human Behavior, July 1976, p.9

Expanding this criticism, Etzioni maintains that the relativistic approach to morality has led to self-centerdness and self-seeking, whereas the real value of morality is in one's ability to curb his impulses and show consideration to the community as a whole. Philosophers like Rawls, Peters, Scheffler, and others agree on this point. Peters in his criticism of Kohlberg's perception of "justice", maintains that justice is merely an agreement that there should be principles. Hence, the entire moral educational process is an illogical act without the identification of these principles.[6]

Principles of morality are necessary from the point of view that ethics are a social process. Values are determined not merely by their inherent worth to the individual, but by how they are perceived by the entire social order. Rawls perceives morality as a learning process which is a rational development of a life-plan. However, the measure of good within such a plan is determined by its contribution to the rational plans of others. Only the community can ratify a moral practice by esteem and admiration without which it cannot exist. "To the degree, then, that the esteem and admiration of others are desired, the activities ... are good for other persons as well."[7] The most important good, says Rawls, is self-esteem which is the function of two primary conditions: a) the existence of a rational life plan, and b) its affirmation and appreciation by others who also benefit from it.[8]

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6 Peters, R. S., Ethics and Education, Scott Foresman, 1966, pp. 50-51.

7 Rawls, John, A Theory of Justice, Harvard Paperbacks, 1971, pp. 425, 428-430, 440.

8 Rawls, Ibid. pp. 440-441

The good moral plan is the challenging and complicated moral plan. The more demanding and the more challenging, the greater the satisfaction and self-esteem of its holder. "The pattern of good life is pleasure, satisfaction and some kind of excellence."[9] Moral education, then, is not merely soul searching discussions in which ignorance is shared mutually, but a lifelong input of hard rational search which is inconceivable without the stydy of our entire cultural heritage, which is the only tool we have to explore our inner-selves. The teaching and studying of such tradition, then, are not mere acts of indoctrination, but the expansion of our intellectual repertoire to enhance our chances to reach meaningful ethical standards. This position is summarized by Scheffler:

> "...the moral point of view is attained, if at all, by acquiring a tradition of practice, embodied in rules and habits of conduct. Without a preliminary emersion in such tradition -- an appreciation of the import of its rules, obligations, rights and demands -- the concept of choice of action and rules for oneself can hardly be achieved. Yet the prevalent tradition of practice can be taught in such a way as to encourage the ultimate attainment of a superordinate and comprehensive point of view."[10]

This is a far cry from the relativistic concept of "mental awareness" which has led some educators to the belief that moral education is merely an act of social muckraking.[11]

What are the antecedents to moral practice? Most philosophers of education agree that the first step in moral education is the development of rational process of thinking based on the study of tradition which can take the form of

9 Frankena, William K., Ethics, Prentice Hall, 1973 (2nd Ed.) p. 91

10 Scheffler, Israel, Reason and Teaching, Routledge and Kegan, 1973, p. 143

11 Gautheir, David P., "Moral Action and Moral Education in Beck et.al. Moral Education, pp. 144-145

history, literature, political science or the fine arts.[12] Each of these disciplines transmits a unique part of human experience which directly reflects on moral behavior, rationality and ethical development. The diffuseness of these fields and their complexity make it impossible to extrapolate from them precise ethical behavioral objectives and measureable outcomes. But, then, we are not dealing in skills in the traditional sense of the word. Morality is a way of life, a whole, which cannot be subdivided. And thus, the channels through which rational life plans are being processed,[13] must also reflect a whole, if they are not to be taken out of context and converted into meaningless and artificial subdivisions, which no longer relate to the truth. These observations lead us to this conclusion: rational learning antecedes the practice of moral principles. Thus before moral principles are practiced they must be absorbed at the cognitive level. The difficulty in a moral education plan, therefore, consists of blending and balancing the cognitive aspects with the practical, guaranteeing that a moral community, which has to emerge at a given point, will not exist in an intellectual vacuum. Thus, we differ with the practices which led to the creation of so called "moral communities" in schools which are based on intellectual superficiality, substituting shallow half truths and slogans for the profound knowledge and understanding

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12 Today many educators have misinterpreted history. The revisionists see history as a conflict of pluralistic value systems. They also attack historians who support the traditional values. As a result value pluralism in the schools has created a vacuum rather than a cohesive commitment to common assumptio. History is clear, however, that a democratic ethos has and will continue to be the basis for moral instruction in our schools. The universals of democracy cut across all cultural traditions and social differences.

13 Peters, Ibid. pp. 8-9

emphasized by educational philosophers. When the principles of democracy are discussed in the classroom, for example, it requires knowledge about and interest in public affairs. This complicated subject like all others involving moral education, cannot be introduced in the form of a reduced social dilemma which involves "only a few characters in a relatively uncomplicated situation which students can grasp readily."[14]

What then, is moral education? Moral education is the understanding of the complexity of human interactions which not only lend quality to our human existence, but provide the rational foundation for an individual's perpetual struggle for excellence within democratic traditions. Its attainment depends on the demand, expectations, and active participation of a supportive moral community and a careful exploration of humanistic disciplines and the fine arts which have been and will continue to be its most natural conveyors.

Teaching ethics requires that we first establish basic principles which are to be learned. In the Salt Lake City School District these are the principles believed to be the bases for moral behavior:

1. Each individual has dignity and worth.
2. A free society requires respect for persons, property, and principles.
3. Each individual has a right to learn and the freedom to achieve.
4. Each individual, regardless of race, creed, color, sex, ethnic background, or economic status, has equal opportunity.
5. Each individual has the right to personal liberties.

[14] Beyes, Barry K., "Conducting Moral Discussions in the Classroom" in Fenton (ed) The Cognitive Developmental, Social Education, April 1976, p. 196

6. Each individual is responsible for his/her own actions.

7. Each individual has a responsibility to the group as well as to the total society.

8. Democratic governments govern by majority vote.

9. Democratic societies are based on law.

10. Problems are solved through reason and orderly processes.

11. An individual should be tolerant of other religious beliefs and should have freedom to exercise his/her own actions.

12. Each individual has the right to work, to pursue an occupation and to gain satisfaction from personal efforts.

There are various programs to teach these principles. Among them are: Law-Related Education, Systems of Justice, Mayflower Compact, Junior Achievement, Community Service, Biography, and Newspaper in the Classroom. In addition, individual teachers have developed programs of their own. Each attempts to teach both effective citizenship and ethical conduct.

More important than curricula and strategies is an interest and commitment to ethics. Teachers must feel that there is a need for the teaching of ethics. They must be willing to learn the various approaches to teach ethics and moral conduct. They must themselves be students of the law, must study moral philosophy, history, logic, and fine arts.

To be an effective teacher of moral conduct, one must study the basic documents of our nation, must read Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. He must study the weaknesses of extreme pluralism and understand the flaws of situational ethics. Similarly, he must be acquainted with basic legal principles and analyze critical social issues and their relationship to personal action. He cannot confuse Thoreau's act of conscience with irresponsible personal behavior.

Teachers of ethics need to develop critical thinking skills. Those who can think critically cannot be deceived by falsehood. They cannot be led to false conclusions which violate the basic ethical principles which they are to teach. They will distinguish between issues and personalities, justice and personal gain, truth and absurdities. The teacher of ethics is one who is aware of basic assumptions, understands incompleteness of information, sees bias as a selective process, and understands the moral relationship between ends and means.

We now have the means. We also have the need. All that is required is the will of the educators to commit themselves to press forward - to do more than we have done before. And we should all remember the statement of Virginia Satir: "The regret of life is not that we are asked to do more; the regret is that so few ever ask." In a society where there is so much to be done, nothing is really of any consequence, unless first we learn the behaviors that raise men and women above the arena reserved for animals. That can be achieved if we feel the obligation to do so.